

March 5, 2008

Coastal Conservation Association of Virginia
11620 Tyshire Terrace
Providence Forge VA 23140

Virginia Recreational Fishing Advisory Board
C/O Jack Travelstead
Virginia Marine Resources Commission
2600 Washington Avenue
Newport News, VA 23607

Dear RFAB Members:

The CCA of VA Fisheries Management Committee has reviewed the proposals submitted for this cycle as has developed the individuals positions noted below. As a result of an anticipated siphoning off of much of the fund to supposedly offset overall state budgetary shortfalls, we have also ranked the proposals in order of their relative importance and ability to address the original intent of the fund. We feel those at the top of this list should be funded under any circumstances.

Project Prioritization:

1. (G) Estimate and Assess Social and Economic Importance and Value of Menhaden to Chesapeake Bay Stakeholders and Region
2. (L) Buckroe Beach Saltwater Fishing Pier
3. (K) Deployment of Artificial Reef Structure
4. (D) Virginia Marine Sportfish Collection
5. (J) Enhancing Submerged Aquatic Vegetation (SAV) Habitat
6. (A) Sunshine Children's Fishing Program and
(B) Saxis & Morley's Wharf Fishing Pier Youth Fishing Tournaments
7. (C) Hope House & Oak Grove Nursing Home Fishing Excursions and Clinics
7. (M) Data collection / Chesapeake Bay Multispecies Monitoring & Assessment
8. (I) Habitat Suitability for Artificial Recreational Fish and Oyster Reefs
9. (H) Enhancement and Sentinel Reefs for the Virginia Artificial Reef Network
10. (F) Juvenile Abundance of Recreationally Important Finfish
11. (E) Abundance of Young-of-year American Eel

Individual Project Comments:

Multi-Year Projects for Renewal:

A. 2008 Sunshine Children's Fishing Program (\$7,194). **SUPPORT.** As has been our historical precedent on such projects, we continue to maintain our steadfast support of such youth events. We feel there are tremendous dividends to be derived from such relatively modest financial outlays. They not only expose an ever-growing number of young people to the joy and conservation ethic of sportfishing, but also provide an avenue for large numbers of volunteers to impart a positive vector on the next generation of Virginians dedicated to the protection of our marine resources.

B. 2008 Saxis & Morley's Wharf Fishing Pier Youth Fishing Tournaments (\$2,500).

SUPPORT. See rationale in (A.) above.

C. 2008 Hope House & Oak Grove Nursing Home Fishing Excursions and Clinics

(\$4,000). **SUPPORT.** While these endeavors are admittedly directed towards a more senior group than the two requests above, they nevertheless provide many of the same benefits to an equally deserving segment of our community. However, we would request the board seek clarification regarding \$1800 for T-shirts, etc. If the shirts will feature the fund as the primary sponsor, the cost may be warranted. However, if VMRC is just one of many sponsors listed, the cost should be shared with those sponsors.

D. Virginia Marine Sportfish Collection (Year2) (\$12,000). **SUPPORT.** We initially voiced support of this modestly priced endeavor in the hope it would significantly augment the database on several species that are of growing interest/concern to the local recreational community. Cobia, red drum, and speckled trout all represent important niche recreational fisheries which will benefit from the additional data necessary for the maintenance of sustainable populations which will hopefully contain ample numbers of trophy sized individuals. Recent reports on tilefish and snowy group sizes and ages are indicative of the value of this type of targeted research.

E. Estimating Relative Abundance of Young-of-year American Eel, in the Virginia Tributaries of the Chesapeake Bay (Year 8) (\$45,348). **DO NOT SUPPORT.** Our prior objections to this project were based primarily on its limited benefit to the recreational angling community. Consequently, we felt funding for this and other related projects on eel research should be sought from the commercial fund. The projected diversion of recreational and commercial funds to satisfy overall state budgetary shortfalls clearly mark this project (which is requesting an additional \$9,000 over last year) as one that not only should not, but can not be supported by the RFAB. Previous arguments that eels are of growing significance as the bait of choice for species such as striped bass and cobia do not constitute sufficient rationale for use of our shrinking recreational license dollars.

F. Estimating Relative Juvenile Abundance of Recreationally Important Finfish in the Virginia Portion of Chesapeake Bay. (450,000). **MARGINAL SUPPORT.** While we gave "partial support" to this project in the past, the present budget constraints dictate the board reviews this project in a more critical light. We again urge VIMS to continue to pursue other avenues/sources for this funding. If the recreational fund is tapped yet again for this project, it should provide no more than ½ of the stated request, given that the commercial sector derives at least an equal benefit for the results of the project.

G. Estimate and Assess Social and Economic Importance and Value of Menhaden to Chesapeake Bay Stakeholders and Region (3 Year Study) (Year 2 \$236,479).

SUPPORT. Our previous support of this important study reflects a ground swell of public support for the necessity of maintaining this vital filter feeder/forage resource. This year's funding request is nearly \$130,00 less than that of the study's first year, and is money well spent if it provides data critical to the ultimate preservation of this keystone

in the bay's overall ecosystem. Our comments in reference to the initial request still reflect our opinions/concerns: "we are keenly interested in and wholeheartedly support an unbiased fact-based study on this topic. We encourage Dr. Kirkley to examine the potential impacts on all stakeholders, including the benefits from the harvest of the species. We agree with the petitioner's assertion that studies such as this are important to the process of transitioning from a species by species management scheme to an ecosystem management scheme. While there might be some that would object to using recreational license money to fund this study, we feel it is in the best interest of the recreational angling community to support funding of this project because menhaden are a primary forage species for many species recreational anglers target. Furthermore, we agree with the VMRC staff recommendation for sharing the cost between the commercial and recreational funds."

H. Enhancement and Sentinel Reefs for the Virginia Artificial Reef Network (\$153,946).

SUPPORT. While this project is intended to assist in determining optimal reef design, the question logically arises regarding the relative importance of this research in light of the monies that have already been allocated to monitor and evaluate the growing number of artificial reefs that we have taken a lead in advocating. Therefore, even in the absence of this project, it would seem at this juncture, or in the near future, we should have a very good indication of the relative performance our existing and growing reef sites. Hopefully, this project will prove valuable in augmenting this information.

I. Habitat Suitability for Artificial Recreational Fish and Oyster Reefs (\$61,076).

SUPPORT. Again, we continue our support of this project in a similar vein as noted above. However, if funding resources are reduced, priority should be given to the two following projects.

J. Enhancing Submerged Aquatic Vegetation (SAV) Habitat: Research and Education for Restoration (\$90,000).

SUPPORT. We have given strong and consistent support to this long running project since its inception in the hope that it will be successful in restoring this most vital of all coastal environments. Our comments from prior cycles still echo our view regarding funding considerations – "while we would hope that some degree of federal funding would be forth coming for the program's sustainment, we would still advocate funding by the board." Furthermore, "we continue to feel the commercial sector should bear an equal cost in this and other SAV projects. However, even if commercial funding would arise, those commercial activities deemed 'detrimental' (haul seining, with associated prop scarring or any type of dredging) to this habitat should be prohibited. The lack of such safeguards would not only jeopardize the health of this habitat, but would also curtail any future support for using recreational monies in this regard."

K. 2008 Deployment of Artificial Reef Structure (\$500,000). **SUPPORT.** As we have stated in the past, no other long term request more clearly targets the intent of this fund to directly address the needs of the state's recreational anglers. Consequently, we not only support this request, but also implore the board to give priority to maintaining the amount

requested for this cycle and to ensure it remains on the “short list” of absolutely essential projects.

New Projects:

L. Buckroe Beach Saltwater Fishing Pier (\$500,000) **SUPPORT.** As in item “K” above, a project that epitomizes the intent of this fund, namely increased/enhanced angler access. The citizens of Hampton, the Peninsula, and indeed much of southeastern Virginia have long awaited steps to reestablish a quality fishing pier to cater to the needs of shore-based anglers. Hurricane Isabel destroyed both Peninsula piers along the bay, and this facility will not only provide pier fishing opportunities for the area for the first time in several years, but also provide a more complete/modern facility with a full array of amenities. However, we were surprised to hear of the request for an additional \$250,000 submitted on 4 March to defray additional unforeseen costs. The increases associated with the final property acquisition and the parking lot environmental modifications seem well founded. The \$100,000 underestimate in the cost of the basic pier amenities, while bothersome, will hopefully ensure the construction of superior facility. Despite these increased estimates, we would like to suggest that additional consideration be given to a step that would directly enhance the fishing quality of the structure – namely, a revision/expansion of the length of the T-head portion of the pier in order to accommodate an even greater number of users.

M. Data collection and analysis in support of single and multispecies stock assessments in Chesapeake Bay: the Chesapeake Bay Multispecies Monitoring and Assessment Program (ChesMMAAP) (\$494,928). **SUPPORT.** We agree that this study has merit in hopefully garnering a considerable volume of data which will be important to the management of many important and mutually interactive species within the bay ecosystem. As with the other proposals for this cycle, allocation of necessary funding in the light of recent budgetary constraints poses the largest hurdle to pursuing this study. Furthermore, as we have stated in other such studies, it is appropriate for the commercial sector to support ½ of the funding for an initiative that would seem to benefit both recreational and commercial groups equally. Of the individuals species noted for study, most are of nearly equal importance to both sectors (even though some are of admittedly vital recreational interest – striped bass and flounder for example); while none are species typically considered of almost total recreational interest (red drum, speckled trout, cobia, spadefish, sheepshead, etc.).

We appreciated the opportunity to again express our views on the allocation of our state's license funds, which at this point, seem in jeopardy. Thank you for your consideration.

Larry Snider
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Vice President
CCA of Virginia